HISTORY

Nelson Mandela 1918-2013: the timeline of a lifetime

A timeline of the 95-year life of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela – revolutionary, soldier, political prisoner, president of South Africa, statesman and global icon of social justice.

Street art in San Francisco shows Nelson Mandela addressing the massive crowd who greeted him on the Grand Parade as he gave his first speech, from a Cape Town city hall balcony, after his release on 11 February 1990 from 27 years in prison. (Julie Pimentel, CC BY-NC 2.0)

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1910s

18 July 1918 – Nelson Mandela born in Mvezo, Eastern Cape province, South Africa. His mother, Nonqaphi Fanny Nosekeni, is one of four wives of his father, Mphakanyiswa Gadla Henry Mandela, a "chief by both blood and custom".

His birth name is Rolihlahla. In isiXhosa it literally translates as "pulling the branch of a tree". But colloquially, it means "troublemaker".

1920s

1925 – Mandela begins primary school near his home village of Qunu. His teacher names him "Nelson".

In his autobiography Long Walk to Freedom, Mandela wrote: "On the first day of school, my teacher, Miss Mdingane, gave each of us an English name and said that from thenceforth that was the name we would answer to in school. This was the custom among Africans in those days and was undoubtedly due to the British bias of our education."

Another story is that the teacher named him "Nelson" after British Navy admiral Horatio Nelson, hero of the Battle of Trafalgar.

The Nelson Mandela Foundation says it's "unclear why Miss Mdingane chose the name 'Nelson'".

Nelson Mandela with his class at Healdtown College circa 1937 to 1938. Mandela is in the back row, fifth from right. (South African History Online)

Mandela wrote: "That day, Miss Mdingane told me that my new name was Nelson. Why she bestowed this particular name upon me I have no idea. Perhaps it had something to do with the great British sea captain Lord Nelson, but that would be only a guess."

1930s

1930 – Mandela's father Mphakanyiswa Gadla Henry Mandela dies. In his autobiography Mandela recalls his father dying when he was nine. He was 12.

Mandela becomes the ward of the Thembu regent, paramount chief Jongintaba Dalindyebo.

1934 – At the age of 16, Mandela undergoes the Xhosa initiation and circumcision ritual. He enrols in the Clarkebury Boarding Institute in Engcobo.

1937 – Enrols in Healdtown, the Wesleyan college in the Eastern Cape town of Fort Beaufort.

1939 – Enrols at the University College of Fort Hare in Alice, Eastern Cape, for a bachelor of arts degree. Here he meets Oliver Tambo.

Nelson Mandela in Mthatha in 1937, aged 19.

1940s

1940 – Expelled from university for joining in a protest boycott.

1941 – Fleeing an arranged marriage, Mandela moves to Johannesburg and works briefly as a night watchman on a gold mine.

1941 – Meets Walter Sisulu, an active member of the African National Congress (ANC), South Africa's major anti-apartheid liberation movement and today the country's ruling party. Sisulu recommends Mandela for employment as an articled clerk at the law firm Witkin, Sidelsky and Eidelmana, and the two become firm friends.

1942 – Begins to attend ANC meetings.

1942 – Completes his bachelor of arts degree by correspondence through the University of South Africa.

1943 – Enrols for an LLB postgraduate law degree at the University of the Witwatersrand.

2 April 1944 – Founds the ANC Youth League together with Anton Lembede, Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu.

5 October 1944 – Mandela marries Evelyn Ntoko Mase, his first wife.

1946 – First son Madiba Thembekile (Thembi) born to Evelyn Mase.

1947 – Mandela's first daughter and second child Makaziwe born to Evelyn Mase. The baby dies nine months later.

1948 – Mandela is elected national secretary of the ANC Youth League.

1948 – The whites-only electorate votes the racist National Party into power in South Africa. Apartheid becomes official government policy.

1949 – The ANC adopts its Programme of Action, inspired by the Youth League, which advocates the weapons of boycott, strike, civil disobedience and non-cooperation with authority.

Nelson Mandela and his future first wife Evelyn Mase in the bridal party at Walter and Albertina Sisulu's wedding on 17 July 1944. Mandela was best man. Mandela and Mase were to marry three months later, on 5 October 1944.

1950s

1950 – The government passes the Suppression of Communism Act. This bans the South African Communist Party. It also bans the "ideology" of communism. The Act broadly defines "communism" as anything aimed "at bringing about any political, industrial, social, or economic change within the Union by the promotion of disturbance or disorder" or encouraging "feelings of hostility between the European and the non-European races".

1950 – Mandela's second son and third child Makgatho born to Evelyn Mase.

1951 – Elected president of the ANC Youth League.

1952 – The ANC launches the Campaign for Defiance of Unjust Laws, later simply known as the Defiance Campaign. Mandela is elected as the ANC's national volunteer-in-chief and travels South Africa organising resistance.

1952 – Mandela is arrested and tried with Walter Sisulu and 18 others under the Supression of Communism Act for his role in the campaign. He is sentenced to nine months' imprisonment with hard labour, suspended for two years.

1952 – Elected president of the Transvaal region of the ANC, and as the first of ANC deputy presidents.

1952 – Opens South Africa's first black-owned law firm in downtown Johannesburg in partnership with Oliver Tambo.

1953 – Devises the M-Plan – or Mandela Plan – for the ANC's future underground operations.

1953 – Second daughter and fourth child born to Evelyn Mase, and named Makaziwe in honour of her infant sister.

In one of many acts of protest during the Defiance Campaign of 1952, a group of black South Africans took over a train compartment reserved for whites and rode into Cape Town, shouting the slogan "Africa!" Thirty-four were then arrested by Cape Town police. (Have You Heard From Johannesburg)

26 June 1955 – The Congress of the People, and alliance of anti-apartheid movements that includes the ANC, adopts the Freedom Charter at Kliptown in Soweto. The charter declared fundamental tenets of a free South Africa, such as "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people."

Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela, young attorneys and partners in South Africa's first black-owned law firm, in the mid-1950s. (The Peto Collection, University of Dundee)

5 December 1956 – Mandela and 150 others arrested and charged with treason. The marathon Treason Trial of 1956 to 1961 followed. All charges were eventually dropped.

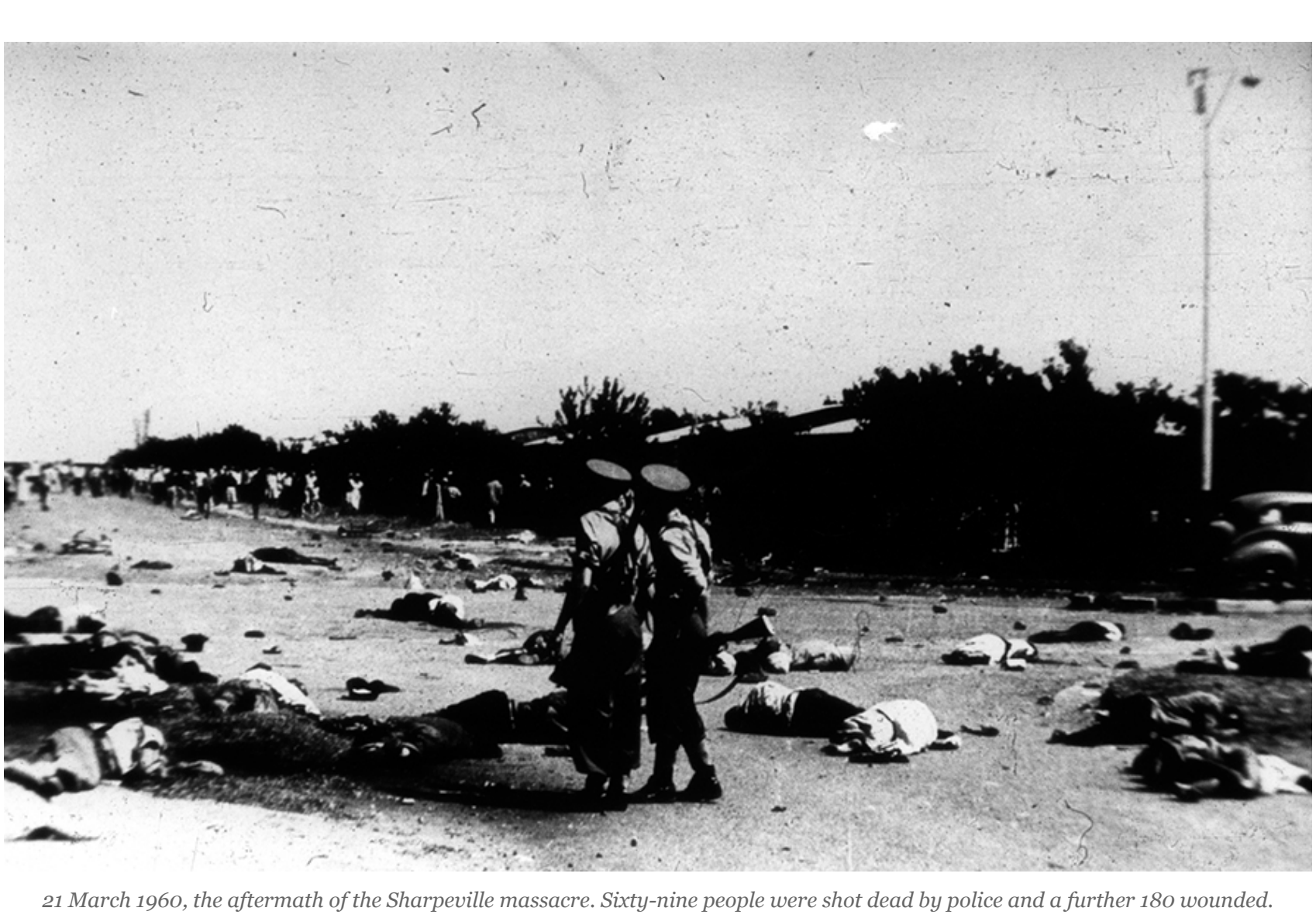
1958 – Mandela divorces Evelyn Mase and marries Winnie Madikizela.

1959 – Third daughter and fifth child Zenani (Zeni) born to Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

1959 – The Africanist faction of the ANC breaks away to form the Pan Africanist Congress under the leadership of Robert Sobukwe and Potlako Leballo.

1960s

21 March 1960 – Police open fire on a peaceful demonstration against the pass laws organised by the PAC in the township of Sharpeville, killing 69 people – many of them shot in the back. The reaction is immediate, with demonstrations, protest marches, strikes and riots across South Africa.



21 March 1960, the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre. Sixty-nine people were shot dead by police and a further 180 wounded. (University of the Western Cape Robben Island Mayibuye Museum Archive)

30 March 1960 – The South African government declares a state of emergency, detaining more than 18 000 people, and banning the ANC and other liberation movements.

1960 – Mandela's fourth daughter and sixth child Zindziswa (Zindzi) born to Winnie Madikizela.

1961 – The Treason Trial ends with all charges against Mandela and his co-defendants being dropped.

1961 – The ANC decides to move from nonviolent to violent means of opposing apartheid. The movement's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe ("Spear of the Nation"), is formed, with Mandela as commander-in-chief.

1961 – In the face of government repression, Mandela goes underground, becoming a master of disguise and managing to evade arrest with such success the media nicknames him the Black Pimpernel.

5 August 1962 – After travelling abroad, and being on the run for 17 months, Mandela is arrested near Howick in Natal and imprisoned in the Johannesburg Fort. He would only be free again in 1990, 28 years later.

The site near Howick where Nelson Mandela was captured in 1962 is today marked by a steel sculpture of his face, which can only be clearly viewed from a specific angle. (Willem van Valkenburg, CC BY 2.0)

25 October 1962 – Mandela is convicted of unlawfully exiting the country and incitement to strike. He is sentenced to five years on Robben Island, the notorious political prison off the coast near Cape Town.

11 July 1963 – While Mandela is in prison, police arrest prominent ANC leaders at their hideout on Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia, north of Johannesburg.

1963 – Mandela and his arrested ANC comrades are charged with sabotage and other crimes in the Rivonia Trial.

20 April 1964 – At the opening of the defence case at the Pretoria Supreme Court, Mandela makes his famous statement from the dock at the Rivonia Trial, in which he lays out the reasoning in the ANC's decision to use violence.

Mandela's statement concludes:

> "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal for which I hope to live for and to see realised. But my lord, if it needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Listen to the final 90 seconds of the speech:

12 June 1964 – The Rivonia Trial ends with Mandela and all his co-accused – except Rusty Bernstein – being found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. Mandela is sent to Robben Island. As a D-group prisoner, the lowest classification, he is allowed one visitor and one letter every six months.

1965 – Mandela's book *No Easy Walk to Freedom* is published by Heinemann.

1968 – Mandela's mother, Nonqaphi Fanny Nosekeni, dies.

1969 – A plan to spring Mandela from jail is infiltrated by secret agent Gordon Winter. Winter is working for the South African authorities, who want Mandela to escape so they can shoot him during recapture. The plot is foiled by British Intelligence.

1969 – Mandela's first-born son Thembi Mandela dies in a car crash, aged 23. Mandela, on Robben Island, is not allowed to attend the funeral.

1969 – Winnie Madikizela-Mandela is jailed at Pretoria Central Prison, where she will spend the next 18 months in solitary confinement.

Mandela's sons Thembekile (left) and Makgatho with their mother Evelyn Mase in the early 1950s. When Thembekile died in a car crash in 1969, aged just 23, Mandela was not allowed to attend his funeral.

1970s

1973 – Daughter Zenani Mandela marries Prince Thumbumuzi Dlamini, elder brother of King Mswati III of Swaziland.

1973 – A nuclear particle discovered by University of Leeds scientists is named the "Mandela particle".

16 June 1976 – In Soweto, South African police open fire on schoolchildren protesting against the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. The Soweto Uprising begins, quickly spreading across South Africa. By the end of the year about 575 people have died, 451 at the hands of police. Thousands of young people leave South Africa to join the ANC's forces in neighbouring countries.

1980s

March 1982 – Mandela is transferred from Robben Island to Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town, along with other ANC leaders Walter Sisulu, Andrew Mlangeni, Ahmed Kathrada and Raymond Mhlaba. It is speculated that this is to remove their influence on a new generation of young black activists imprisoned on Robben Island.

26 June 1983 – Sculpture in a city park by Elisabeth Frink, dedicated to Mandela, is unveiled in Dublin, Ireland. As second sculpture was unveiled in Dublin a year later.

20 August 1983 – The United Democratic Front (UDF), a coalition of about 400 civic, church, students', workers' and other organisations, formed to fight apartheid inside South Africa. With the slogan "UDF unites, apartheid divides", its 3- million members were a powerful force in the internal anti-apartheid struggle.

1984 – English ska band The Special AKA release the song "Free Nelson Mandela", which reaches number nine on the British charts. The song was banned in South Africa, but bootleg tracks found their way into many parties.

February 1985 – President PW Botha offers to free Mandela on condition that he unconditionally rejects violence as a political weapon.

Mandela rejects the offer. In a statement, he says:

> "What freedom am I being offered while the organisation of the people remains banned? Only free men can negotiate. A prisoner cannot enter into contracts."

A 1984 United Democratic Front poster calling on white, coloured and Indian South Africans to boycott separately organised apartheid elections.

28 October 1985 – Statue of Mandela is unveiled in Southbank in London by Oliver Tambo, now the exiled president of the ANC.

November 1985 – Minister of Justice and Prisons Kobie Coetsee meets Mandela in Volks Hospital in Cape Town, where Mandela is recovering from prostate surgery. This is the first meeting between Mandela and the National Party government and is followed by a series of tentative meetings that lay the groundwork for future negotiations. But little progress is made.

1985 – Stevie Wonder dedicates his Oscar for the song "I Just Called to Say I Love You" to Mandela. Wonder's music is then banned by the state-run SABC, the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

1988 – Mandela is transferred from Pollsmoor Prison to Victor Verster Prison near Paarl in the Western Cape. A number of restrictions are lifted, and friends and family are able to meet him.

1988 – The Nelson Mandela 70th Birthday Tribute concert is held at London's Wembley Stadium. It was a focal point of the external anti-apartheid movement, with prominent musicians – including Simple Minds, Santana, Tracy Chapman, Salif Keita, Annie Lennox and Whitney Houston – voicing their support for Mandela.

1989 – President PW Botha Botha is replaced by FW de Klerk.

1990s

2 February 1990 – President FW de Klerk announces Mandela and other political prisoners will be released and the ANC and other resistance movements unbanned.

11 February 1990 – In the full glare of international media attention, Mandela walks free from Victor Verster Prison in Cape Town.

4 May 1990 – Negotiations to end apartheid between the ANC and the government begin at the presidential residence, Groote Schuur. They issue the Groote Schuur Minute, a joint commitment to resolve the existing climate of violence and intimidation and to remove practical obstacles to negotiation, including indemnity from prosecution for returning exiles and the release of political prisoners.

6 August 1990 – The ANC and the government extend their consensus in the Pretoria Minute, which includes the suspension of the armed struggle by the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto weSizwe.

1991 – The first national conference of the ANC held inside South Africa in decades elects Mandela as president of the party. Oliver Tambo, the previous president, becomes national chairperson.

The front page of the Sunday Times on 11 February 1990, the day of Nelson Mandela's release. FW de Klerk is to his right. It was illegal for any photos of political prisoners to be published, so this was the first picture of Mandela the world had seen since 1962. (Sunday Times)

20 August 1991 – The United Democratic Front is disbanded.

14 September 1991 – The National Peace Accord is signed by representatives of 27 political organisations and national and homeland governments, preparing the way for the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) negotiations.

20 December 1991 – Plenary session of Codesa at the World Trade Centre in Kempton Park, near Johannesburg.

On 11 February 1990 Mandela made his first public speech, after 27 years in jail, to a crowd of 100 000 gathered on the Grand Parade in Cape Town. There was "no option" but that struggle against apartheid continue until the system was dismantled, he said. "But we express the hope that a climate conducive to a negotiated settlement will be created soon, so that there may no longer be any need for the armed struggle to continue."

18 March 1992 – After the National Party begins to lose by-elections to the pro-apartheid Conservative party, a referendum of white voters is held to determine if FW de Klerk has their mandate to end apartheid. An overwhelming 68% votes "yes", allowing negotiations to proceed.

April 1992 – Mandela and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela separate.

May 1992 – Codesa II begins the second round of negotiations.

17 June 1992 – The Boipatong massacre. During the night, a heavily armed band of Inkatha Freedom Party loyalists invade the Vaal township of Boipatong and kill 46 people. Mandela accuses the government of complicity in the atrocity and withdraws the ANC from negotiations. The ANC takes to the streets with a programme of rolling mass action.

17 June 1992, the aftermath of the Boipatong massacre. Photographer Greg Marinovich describes the image: "The aunt of nine-month-old Aaron Mathope sits next to his body in Boipatong township, south of Johannesburg, 1992. On this day, 45 people were killed by Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) supporting Zulus. Aaron and his mother were hacked to death, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) found both the IFP and the security forces of the then-white regime responsible." (Greg Marinovich, University of Cape Town Digital Collections)

7 September 1992 – The army of the spurious "homeland" of Ciskei opens fire on protest marchers near Bhisho, killing 28. The Bhisho massacre brings a new urgency to the search for a political settlement.

7 September 1992, the Bhisho massacre in progress. Photographer Greg Marinovich describes the image: "African National Congress supporters flee towards the South African side of the border with the Ciskei bantustan after they were fired at, killing 29 marchers and wounding dozens, during an ANC march on the Ciskei homeland, 7 September, 1992. The ANC supporters were killed when Ciskei security forces opened fire after the marchers broke through the border in an attempt to force the Ciskeien military leader, Brigadier Oupa Gqozo, to allow free political activity in Ciskei." (Greg Marinovich, University of Cape Town Digital Collections)

26 September 1992 – Negotiations resume when the government and ANC agree on a Record of Understanding dealing with a constitutional assembly, an interim government, political prisoners, hostels,

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